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Week of
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Critics'

THEATRE REVIEWS

1942

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†"Heart of a City" opened Thursday, February 12th, at Henry Miller's Theatre.
†"They Should Have Stood in Bed" opened Friday, February 13th, at the Mansfield Theatre.

THEATRE REVIEWS IS A COMPLETE GUIDE AND RECORD TO THE NEW YORK SHOWS

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NEW YORK POST
NEW YORK HERALD TRIBUNE
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NEW YORK TIMES
NEW YORK DAILY NEWS
NEW YORK WORLD-TELEGRAM
NEW YORK JOURNAL-AMERICAN

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"Heart of a City"

NEW YORK HERALD TRIBUNE
February 13, 1942

Saga of a Theater

By RICHARD WATTS, JR.

THE irresistibly dramatic subject of war-time London at the height of the German aerial assault is once more fervently contemplated in the new play at Henry Miller's Theater. This time, however, the topic is studied, not through the eyes of a recalcitrant Cockney skipper, but through the rather more lyric orbs of the group of valiant show girls who carried on unflaggingly at their small revue theater during the blackest days and nights of Nazi fury. The saga of the Windmill Theater off Shaftesbury Avenue, which kept its doors open continuously and its shows going on unceasingly while more dignified playhouses bowed for the moment to the terrors of the air, is a gallant one in the history of both London and show business, and its unterrified annals are celebrated with sympathy and understanding in the drama called "Heart of a City."

• • •

In no critical sense can it be said that "Heart of a City" is a good play. Its incidents are obvious and undistinguished, its emotions are frequently unbelievable, and its spirit of the stiff upper lip is at times just a bit trying. The aviators who invade its precincts upon occasion are once or twice too jolly for comfort and there is an air of fabrication in writing and plotting that keeps Miss Storm's play from being a drama of distinguished character. Yet the truth remains that there is something in the compulsion of our times and in the quiet valor of the spirit of the Windmill Theater and its girls which gives the work a quality and an emotional value that raise it far beyond the merit of its workmanship and its narrative. So many bitter things have been said about this barbaric age that it is worth noting, and being even a little cheerful about, that these simple emotions of bravery among the humble belong to it also.

• • •

So far as a story goes, "Heart of a City" is chiefly about two girls from the theater and the two young men they love. The first falls in love with a dashing aviator and the other is in love with the bitter and drunken young man who writes the music for the shows. No one who has seen even one act will be surprised to learn that the first girl gets her aviator and that the second dies in an air raid while attempting to comfort the drunken young man as he drowns his picturesque emotions over the loss of the other actress to the flying man. The chances are that you will not be greatly interested in this somewhat infinitesimal plot but some of the characters, in particular a bibulous but heroic matron, and a great deal of the spirit that the new work celebrates will seem strangely touching. One beauty of Miss Storm's play is that it is never ostentatious and is rarely too noble.

• • •

The acting is satisfactory. Miss Gertrude Musgrove, a newcomer to the local stage, is straightforward, humorous and attractive as the girl who dies in the bombing, and Miss Beverly Roberts, once of the movies, is satisfactory as the more successful heroine. Miss Margot Grahame, who was in that best of talking motion pictures, "The Informer," is effective as one of the gayer girls of the music halls. In the small role of a beautiful and dumb chorus girl, who is not too discriminating in the nationalities of her lovers and is the butt of her fellow performers, Miss Frances Tannehill creates something of a character. Miss Bertha Belmore is excellent as the Cockney matron. The men are kept properly in their place, but, even if they have nothing much to do, they are satisfactory enough about it. It is the spirit of the day that gives "Heart of a City" its appeal, but its emotions are honorable ones.

NEW YORK SUN
February 13, 1942

'Heart of a City,' a Gay and Affecting Play, Opens at Henry Miller's

By RICHARD LOCKRIDGE

YOU may not altogether believe in Lesley Storm's "Heart of a City," which opened last evening at Henry Miller's Theater. Now and then you may shake a dubious head over the author's contrivances, and wish she had added a little here and taken away a little there. But you will, I think, believe fully in the people she is writing about, and share fully in the funny and terrifying and tragic things which happen to them in blitzed London. Miss Storm's characters are people you will be proud and happy to know.

Most of them are the girls playing in a little revue, defying bombs in a side street in London, singing and dancing for Londoners who will take a chance to hear singing and join in laughter. Such a little revue did run through the blitz, according to a program note, and kept a theater open when all the bigger and graver theaters closed down. Miss Storm went backstage to watch the troupers and wrote her play about what she saw.

Having a sharp eye and a sympathetic mind, she saw the little ways of gallantry which did not recognize itself as gallant. The girls were brave and frightened, they were gay and sad, they made jokes and sang songs and fell in love. One of them was deliciously stupid, and another was in love with the wrong man and one of them found a few days of happiness in her love for a flying officer and these two started a new life between bomb bursts. The girls paraded in scanty costumes and pranced in familiar patterns and only a few of them were particularly good at their job. And perhaps their job was not of vast importance; they had no illusion about that.

But they stuck at their job and the Germans couldn't drive them out. On nights of the full moon they cowered on mattresses in the basement dressing room and the next night they got up and danced again. When the house across the street was bombed, they went out in the dust and smoke and helped as they could, and came back and fainted at what they had seen. And they dug their heels in and wouldn't run away.

There is little attempt at Henry Miller's to make all this spectacular, and maybe the sounds aren't right, maybe the red glow is merely a red spot off-stage and maybe the play itself creaks a little. (It could have been better staged in spots, and there are repetitions which should have been seen to. And there is a final scene which lets everybody down badly.) But more than any play of this war we have yet seen, "Heart of a City" is affectingly real. It is real in feeling and in dialogue, and it manages to be at the same time funny, and moving and full of unobvious excitements.

The play brings several young actresses into deserved prominence, and I am not talking—at any rate not exclusively—about the costumes. Miss Beverly Roberts plays one of the central roles warmly and understandingly, and Miss Gertrude Musgrove, making her American debut, is pert and charming and knows how to underplay emotional scenes beautifully. There is very funny nitwit playing by one young woman about whose identity I am unfortunately vague, but who may be Frances Tannehill. Dennis Hoey and Lloyd Gough play effectively among their entrancing companions, and Richard Ainley acts the role of a love-stricken flyer with quiet sincerity. I think you will enjoy all of Miss Storm's people and, because of them, their play.

NEW YORK TIMES
February 13, 1942

THE PLAY IN REVIEW
"Heart of a City"

By BROOKS ATKINSON

ALTHOUGH two backgrounds are better than one, they do not equal a standard-gauged play. In "Heart of a City," which was well produced at Henry Miller's last evening, Lesley Storm has done what she can to prove that they do. For she has written a sentimentally appreciative sketch of backstage in a London theatre during wartime. In point of fact, Mrs. Storm is celebrating the gallantry of the Windmill Theatre, where musical shows have been acted regularly since the war began, with and without air raids and ground audiences.

• • •

Backstage gives her an opportunity of hustling show girls in and out of a hospitable dressing room where they promenade in costumes that are both jaunty and drafty. And since Gilbert Miller, as director, has kept his eyes propped well open you can bet that the show girls have either shape or effulgence or both. When they are not calumniating each other in the dressing room or huddling together during a blitz, they are putting on a musical show somewhere on the other side of Harry Horner's scenery. In a fleeting prologue and epilogue you are permitted to catch a glimpse of them at work. Obviously that is the more interesting side of the Windmill Theatre. If Mr. Miller turned the scenery completely around he might have a livelier show than the one Mrs. Storm has written.

• • •

For she has nothing precisely memorable to put in front of two redolent backgrounds. Rosalind, the star at the Windmill, falls romantically in love with a dashing R. A. F. pilot, who, in turn, fell in love with her when he was sitting in the front row. They sensibly decide to get married without delay. Since Mrs. Storm writes the romantic scenes frugally, the love story does not amount to much. Most of "Heart of a City" is composed of episodes in local color and peril—gossip backstage, casual speculations on the philosophy of living in wartime, air raids with screaming sound effects and harrowing reports of tragedy across the street. "The Wookey" had a definite point of view and the terrifying sound effects helped to project it. But "Heart of a City" exploits the heroism of a battered city for a theatre show. No doubt the intentions are honorable. But in view of the human suffering at stake and the poverty of Mrs. Storm's writing the effect in the theatre is not altogether creditable.

The effect of Beverly Roberts in the theatre is entirely creditable, for she is a shining blonde in chorus girl's costume, and the effect of Gertrude Musgrove, Margot Grahame and Frances Tannehill is creditable, also. For the Windmill Theatre has a rhapsodic personnel. Lloyd Gough ably plays the part of a heartbroken song-writer with a fine taste for liquor and Richard Ainley does well by the part of the lucky pilot. As the dauntless impresario, Dennis Hoey grunts affably when he ponders the crises of show business in wartime. In the design of the production Mr. Miller and Mr. Horner have had a number of interesting ideas. But Mrs. Storm's script is not up to them.

"Heart of a City"

NEW YORK JOURNAL-AMERICAN
February 13, 1942

'Heart of a City' Has Premiere at Miller's

Humor and Fine Spirit Mark Play About How London Behaved Under Blitz

By JOHN ANDERSON

SAFELY rescued from Mr. Hecht's recent morgue in "Lily of the Valley," Gilbert Miller made things more cheerful at Henry Miller's Theatre last night when he presented "Heart of a City" a pleasantly sentimental play by Lesley Storm, about a London theatre during the blitz. As wartime romance of popular design it taps those twin gushers of the emotions—backstage heartbreak and London under bombardment and floods the stage with laughter, tears, love and dynamite, all mixed heavily with grease paint from a well-known recipe for gravy in the box office. As dished up handsomely by Mr. Miller with some beautiful young actresses and some snatches of music it seems to have what it takes.

Miss Storm is writing about the Windmill Theatre in London, a small playhouse in Great Windmill Street, off Piccadilly, which has kept its doors open through all the raids of the Luftwaffe. As a "shop window" for youthful talent it beckons attention with shows called, with that horrible mangling of words the English can also take, "revuedeville." It survived that for eight years before Hitler closed every other theatre in London. Its current show is the thirty-sixth in a series of revues.

While "Heart of a City" thus has a background of fact, and includes incidents that actually happened, its characters and its plot are all imaginary, and even a little synthetic. Miss Storm is at her best when she is creating an atmosphere of the beleagured theatre, its lights blacked out, its audience filling a couple of rows, and its dressing rooms a-quiver with tense, but scantily clad young women willing to expose themselves to an audience and German bombs at one and the same time. The first act is by far the best when with the news of the fall of France the girls scamper off to the stage while the growling voice of Mr. Churchill comes over the radio—"we will never surrender."

Since this is a war by, with, and against civilians, the play is, it is true, a sort of civilian "Journey's End" but without the reticence of that trench-bound war play. Indeed, one of its best lines is spoken by the hero of its romantic plot, an R. A. F. medal-list who, hearing his first London raid on the ground, says he wouldn't have nerve enough to be a civilian.

Though he is the fellow who gets the girl in the story the hero is the human race in make-up. Miss Storm's deepest tribute is to the indomitable gallantry of people who can entertain and be entertained in the midst of hell-fire. Her salute is to those who can make-believe on both sides of the footlights in the deadly hail of reality. It is a gesture toward those who, if they are to die, choose to die laughing.

In all of this her play scores its surest and most valiant points. There is no use wondering if the dramatic effect would not have been greater if her theatrical people had been untheatrical. Here they are as she saw them in many blitz nights spent at the Windmill, but with so much melodrama around so much grease paint we must excuse color that deepens to gaudiness. The plot has the merit at least of seeming almost as accidental as life or death under bombardment, as casual, and as sketchy.

If Miss Storm deals in stencils she writes with humor and fine spirit. Some of her dialogue is immensely funny and she can create passages of genuine gaiety as well as scenes of powerful tension. Her characters are scarcely more than pencilled in, but thanks to Mr. Miller's excellent casting and direction and some admirable performances, they take on true dimensions. Harry Horner's settings are fine in mood and mechanically perfect.

The best of the acting goes to Gertrude Musgrove, a newcomer to Broadway, and to Beverly Roberts who give performances of such feeling and effect that they conceal some of the spuriousness of the writing. Frances Tannehill is amusing (and quite an eyeful) as a dumb floosy who can't tell a Nazi from a stage-door Johnny, and Richard Ainley portrays the R. A. F. hero believably and with ease.

There are admirable performances also by Bertha Belmore, Dennis Hoey, and Margot Grahame, and though Lloyd Gough does his tousellest best to suggest an embittered and alcoholic young song writer, unable to fly, the part sounds phonier than an off-stage motor.

As her title suggests, Miss Storm's play is mostly heart. It should comfort and delight another city whose pulse-beat moves into the target range.

'HEART OF A CITY'

A play in three acts by Lesley Storm; staged by Gilbert Miller; settings by Harry Horner; presented by Mr. Miller at Henry Miller's Theater on February 12, 1942. The cast:

Judy	Gertrude Musgrove
Frenchie	Jeanne McNally
Betty	Terry Fay
Bubbles	Virginia Bolen
Diana	Leone Wilson
Ann	Cora Smith
Pamela	Augusta Roeland
Toni	Margot Grahame
George	Skelton Knaggs
Valerie	Frances Tannehill
Patsy	Caroline Bergh
Rosalind	Beverly Roberts
Joan	Virginia Peine
Leo Saddle (Lt. S.)	Dennis Hoey
Tommy	Lloyd Gough
Mrs. Good	Bertha Belmore
Anna	Miriam Goldina
Gloomy	Victor Beecroft
First Pilot Officer	Peter Boyne
Second Pilot Officer	Bertram Tanswell
Third Pilot Officer	Fred Stewart
Czech Officer	Richard Stevens
Fourth Pilot Officer	Edward Langley
June	Harda Normann
Fifth Pilot Officer	John Ireys
Bob	Rodney Stewart
Polish Officer	Jonathan Harris
Wing Commander	Robert Whitehead
Group Captain	Austin Fairman
Sergeant	Louis Meslin
Paul Lundy	Richard Ainley

NEW YORK POST
February 13, 1942

"Heart of a City," a London War Play, at Henry Miller's Theatre

By WILELLA WALDORF

THE Windmill Theatre in London, a little playhouse off Shaftesbury Avenue dedicated to the presentation of something called "non-stop revaudeville," was the only theatre in the West End that managed to stay open and keep its show going straight through the "blitz" while the city was bombed every night.

Lesley Storm spent a good deal of time backstage during the raids, when some of the girls slept on mattresses on the floor of a basement dressing room, and "Heart of a City," presented at Henry Miller's Theatre last night, is the result of her observations. Although her play owes its inspiration to the Windmill, and some of the incidents actually occurred there, her characters, says a program note, are of course imaginary people.

In presenting a group of struggling show-girls face to face with a morale-shattering crisis, Miss Storm has written a highly effective first act in which the fledgling actresses not only show that they can take it, but that they can take it with a smile. In the opening scenes in the "star" dressing room, in which nearly everybody seems to congregate on occasion, she catches with keen perception and humor the fine spirit displayed by Londoners in general during that terrible summer. As Mrs. Good, the talkative charwoman, puts it on one of her periodic visits, it ain't a funny subject exactly, but sometimes you can't help laughin'.

The Show Must Go On

As the evening progresses, it develops that Miss Storm is more talented at writing individual incidents than she is at putting together a play. Casting about for a plot to hold the thing together, she has dragged in a routine story about Judy, the comedienne, who is in love with Tommy, the song-writer at the theatre, who in turn is in love with Rosalind, the leading lady, who falls for a bomber officer when the company goes off one Sunday to entertain the troops. Some of the individual scenes, at the Bomber Station, and back in the theatre again during the worst of the "blitz," are amusing, touching and sometimes very moving. Almost any one of them could be presented singly and give, in itself, a graphic impression of what Londoners went through when the Jerrys were coming over every night to drop their bombs on the civilian population.

Now and then there is a bit too much of the "chin up, stiff upper lip, stout fella" attitude, but the author and director almost always realize this as soon as the audience does, and immediately turn it off with a joke. If the playwright had only been able to construct out of this series of episodes a genuinely gripping drama, "Heart of a City" might have turned out to be an event of considerable power in the theatre. As it is, it is a workmanlike presentation of a series of scenes about air raids in the West End and how some minor theatre-folk stood up to them.

Curiously enough, when the events become more melodramatic, even tragic, along toward the end, they are less affecting than some of the seemingly trivial, less violent moments earlier in the play. It is the little things, the casual remarks, the changes in the simple, ordinary routine of life that are most affecting in "Heart of a City." For its charming sequences, its gallantry and its humor we can warmly recommend Gilbert Miller's latest production while wishing at the same time that its author had been able to write a brilliant play instead of merely a series of impressions.

A Capable Company

Mr. Miller has staged the work sympathetically with some atmospheric scenery by Harry Horner, and the large cast is generally commendable. Gertrude Musgrove drew most of the comedy lines and did well with them. Bertha Belmore was an unfailing hit as the charwoman, and Skelton Knaggs had a way with the role of the Cockney call-boy. Dennis Hoey as the manager, Lloyd Gough as the moody, poetic song-writer; Richard Ainley as the lovelorn airman, and the girls, headed by Margot Grahame and Beverly Roberts, fitted into the picture pleasantly.

It was Frances Tannehill, if we read our program aright, playing the dumb-dora strip-teaser to whom the whole war was just a huge, provoking mystery. Informed by an RAF pilot from Kansas City that he didn't particularly care for the British, but admired their cause, she inquired, completely bewildered: "Cause? What cause?"

"Heart of a City"

NEW YORK DAILY NEWS
February 13, 1942

'Heart of a City Tells of Show Folk in a London Blitz

"Heart of a City," drama by Lesley Storm. Produced by Gilbert Miller at Henry Miller's Theatre, New York, Feb. 12, 1942.

★ ★ ★

By BURNS MANTLE

HERE at Henry Miller's Theatre is a tidy bit of realism showing the reactions of a theatrical troupe playing in London while the blasting Germans were trying to break the spirit of Britain in September, 1940.

"Heart of a City," in fact, is more realism than drama; a casual survey rather than a tense story of adventure. It is "The Wookey" with romantic trimmings; "Golden Wings" with the glamour of the theatre added.

I like it better than I did either of these previous war plays, because I think it is a better job of writing and staging than either. It is punctuated with dramatic incidents that achieve an emotional effect without too obvious a strain—the rehearsal of a song while the bombs thunder; the quick cementing of a war concert romance; the panic of a stampeded chorus the time incendiary bombs started a fire nearby; the wild eagerness of the girls to help in a crisis.

Believable Folk

Someway you believe these theatre folk, for all they represent a kind of unconvincing cleanliness and order in both their thinking and their backstage lives.

Probably because you are more pleased to believe than to disbelieve them; it may be because you have never had contact with such a theatre as "the little Windmill Theatre off Shaftesbury Avenue" that carried on through all the bombings in London.

The spirit of the Britishers' defiance shines through them without the aid of mock heroics, just as it shines through all the accounts that have come, by letter or story, from London.

There is something of that spiritual glow that has sustained Britain's little people without they or their biographers being quite able to explain why. Their sudden conquering of any panicky fear of death the closer it comes to them; their quick adoption of a philosophy based in their religious teaching that "if it is to be now, it will be; if it is not to be, we need not worry."

"Heart of a City" in general outline is the story of a semi-professional revue troupe of players that included Judy, who was gay and defiant in blitz and out, and who loved Tommy, the song writer; of Rosalind, who was pretty and love-stricken the night she met Paul Lundy at an RAF concert; of Tommy, who wanted to marry Rosalind and couldn't see Judy, and didn't care much about living after Rosalind met Paul.

Actors Help

It is the sort of story for which the actors do much more than the author. Happily these are likable actors. Gertrude Musgrove, newly come from London, is a pert and pleasant snub-nose, who has had her successes in English theatres and pictures. She makes Judy amusing and likable.

Beverly Roberts is one of our own, blonde and attractive, good enough actress to win sympathy and usually in better voice than she was last night. She plays Rosalind.

Margot Grahame is a picture girl with red hair, a good sense of drama and a determined method. She's the Toni. Richard Ainley, son of Henry Ainey, a leading man who once was known as the handsomest actor in England, is a believable Paul. Lloyd Gough is an honest actor who has been shunted through a lot of thankless parts recently, but refuses to let them get him down. He's the Tommy.

There are plenty of others, including Bertha Belmore and Dennis Hoey, and they are all good. Nice realistic settings by Henry Horner; a variety of flashing costumes; a frank display of burlesque nudities. Altogether quite an evening, interesting if not greatly rewarding.

NEW YORK WORLD-TELEGRAM
February 13, 1942

Heart of a City Is the Wookey—with ookey

By FRANK FARRELL
(The drama editor bats for John Mason Brown, on lecture tour)

FIVE months ago—it seems more like five years ago—we studied the stamina of Britain's "little men," melodramatically depicted in The Wookey. Last night a new play, Heart of a City, presented the case of London's "little women," as revealed by the air-raid reactions of the pulchritudinous cast in a music-hall revue. Since its chief difference from the earlier Frederick Hazlitt Brennan play is that in its theatrical dressing room setting a lot more than air-raid reactions are revealed by the beauties of the chorus, you might summarize Heart of a City as being The Wookey—with ookey. That's all, brother.

• • •

Authoress Lesley Storm has given her players as little to hold them together as they have to wear in some of their scenes. Fortunately I'm not old enough to resent the latter, but unfortunately I'm not young enough to overlook the artificial respiration with which she strives to keep the wheels of her hackney-coach rolling. A canned radio address by Winston Churchill is the hypo with which she winds up the first scene. The singing of God Save the King saves another. But toward the end of the second act you can see how difficult it is going to be to save the play.

• • •

From the bevy of beauties backstage, Miss Storm singles out the romances of two for the foundation of Heart of a City. Judy (Gertrude Musgrove), a snub-nosed darling, is in love with Tommy (Lloyd Gough), the revue's lyric writer who loves Rosalind (Beverly Roberts) who loves an RAF squadron leader. Things like that are always going on among the mice backstage.

Well, there's an awful lot of talking in which you get a pretty good picture of what plays with the third from left in the second line and other lassies between scenes at the music hall. The knitting, the boy friends, the old British stiff upper lip, the show must go on and that sort of thing are plainly in evidence. But not too much so, Miss Storm refrained magnificently from overdoing it in that department.

Rosalind gets her aviator in most precise and chilly British style. Judy and Tommy get killed by a direct hit in the last scene's blitz. And there you have it.

• • •

Producer Gilbert Miller knows his showgirls, judging by the excellence of his distaff casting. Gertrude Musgrove, in her American debut, gives a splendid account of herself in the role of the ill-fated Judy. Margot Grahame, in her New York debut, is adequate in her red-headed assignment. And, debut or no, while Beverly Roberts played actress with laudable charm last night, I think the legitimate theater will survive without her singing.

Of the long and short-stemmed beauties more seen than heard from, Frances Tannehill gives a delightful characterization of a dim-witted, round-heeled representative. But she gravely concerned customers in the first ten rows with a leg display of black-and-blue such as one might derive in an ice-hockey free-for-all. Virginia Peine sparkles as the diamond-gartered, horn-rimmed spectacled type who might have read a book. Caroline Bergh gets in a good scream in the first act and several lines and a nose-sniffle later on. And Bertha Belmore is fine as the backstage chaperone and bottle-washer.

There's no fault in the male section, either. Richard Ainley, Dennis Hoey and Lloyd Gough hold up wonderfully in the risky rumbling of Miss Storm's rickety vehicle. Trouble is that it's five months late, already aged, and it hasn't enough fuel for a good week-end drive.

NEW YORK NEWSPAPER "PM"
February 13, 1942

London's Troupers Defy the Blitz

By LOUIS KRONENBERGER

OF London's many theaters, only the tiny, side-street Windmill, with its youthful *Non-Stop Revue*, never shut down all through the 1940 Blitz. That achievement of British grit and trouper gumption inspired Lesley Storm to write *Heart of a City*, most of which takes place in a Windmill dressing room while outside guns rattle and bombs fall from the sky. Inside there still criss-cross the frayed and tangled emotions of private lives, along with fear and courage and the regular rounds of the callboy.

It is a touching enough situation, in which our own emotions are these days more than a little involved. Mr. Miller has brought to it some lively and sympathetic direction. He has fetched for it an attractive and largely English cast. The play itself is pleasantly spattered with English humor, and is disinfected of undue mawkishness and heroics by the saving British habit of having the characters rag one another and laugh at themselves. There is nothing soupy about *Heart of a City*. In terms of treatment, there is only the theater's incorrigible weakness of sounding too many false notes in the midst of true ones and of going in for anything that will get an effect. In terms of playwrighting, there is only the drawback of not having written a play.

For agreeable though *Heart of a City* often is, if you strip it of its atmosphere and its youth, you have nothing left. Its picture is quickly painted; after that, it can only keep painting it over again. That it lacks a sustained plot is not to its discredit; it could scarcely have one that would ring true. But the scraps of plot and bits of incident it does have, are all ready-made and banal. And its characters have no real individuality. One or two of them are charming; one or two are amusing. But then none of them react or change or grow. They are typically and predictably English, and at even her best the author handles them with mild but persistent sentimentality. At her worst, she merely descends to tricks.

Perhaps this is taking the play too seriously. But simply judged as entertainment, it is still too thin. The Windmill Theater is at its best on its own tiny stage. It gets lost on the Henry Miller's.

There are very winning performances by Beverly Roberts and Gertrude Musgrove as two of the Windmill showgirls. Miss Musgrove has a likeable English pertness in addition to a good deal of skill; and Miss Roberts is as charming to watch as she is attractive to look at. Margot Grahame and Frances Tannehill do well in smaller parts, and Bertha Belmore is excellent as a comic middle-aged Cockney. In not very rewarding roles, Dennis Hoey, Lloyd Gough and Richard Ainley offer not very rewarding performances.

"They Should Have Stood in Bed"

NEW YORK SUN
February 14, 1942

'They Should Have Stood in Bed,' a Farce, Opens at the Mansfield

By RICHARD LOCKRIDGE

IT SEEMS a pretty silly matter to bring up, but a farce called "They Should Have Stood in Bed" opened last evening at the Mansfield Theater. In it Tony Canzoneri makes his debut as an actor; in it Jack Gilford makes funny faces for three consecutive minutes, thus achieving what must be the longest "take" on record; in it Sanford Meisner spends an entire evening looking very, very sad. Mr. Meisner has cause.

Three authors named Leo Rifkin, Frank Tarloff and David Shaw banded together to perpetrate this practical joke on Mr. Meisner, Mr. Gilford, Mr. Canzoneri, the other members of the cast and the members of the audience. They pretended that four members of the cast were young men trying to live by their wits, of which they had few. These young men wanted to start a restaurant and ended up with a cook masquerading as a prizefighter, three gamblers on their necks and other complicated problems which, I am glad to find, I have had no trouble whatever in forgetting.

Mr. Canzoneri, who was a fighter himself not so long ago and must remember wistfully the days when he had only one other fighter against him and not three authors, has one rather funny line. This comes in the third act. Mr. Gilford's faces are moderately amusing, if not as amusing as he has allowed himself to believe. Mr. Meisner's justified despair is occasionally comic and the other actors run themselves ragged, expressing improbable emotions with great vivacity in a barnlike set designed by Samuel Leve.

The authors have contributed only meaningless complications, foolish invention and laboriously unamusing lines. It is difficult to sustain farce at this level; farce is apt to have funny moments here and there in spite of all that authors can do. But the Messrs Rifkin, Tarloff and Shaw have achieved a farce which is never really funny, even by accident. It is a curious accomplishment. The Messrs. Rifkin, Tarloff and Shaw should have obeyed the injunction of their title. They should have been sent to bed without their typewriters.

'THEY SHOULD HAVE STOOD IN BED'

A comedy in three acts by Leo Rifkin, Frank Tarloff and David Shaw; staged by Luther Adler; settings by Samuel Leve; presented at the Mansfield Theatre on February 13, 1942, by Sam H. Grisman in association with Alex H. Cohen. The cast:

Al Hartman	Grant Richards
Barney Snedeker	Jack Gilford
Sam Simpkins	Sanford Meisner
Mr. Cooper	LeRoi Operti
Harry Driscoll	Russell Morrison
Vivian Lowe	Florence Sundstrom
Henry Angel	Edwin Philips
George Jensen	John Call
Julius P. Chatfield	Richard Irving
A Policeman	Robert Williams
Killer Kane	Tony Canzoneri
Mike Gilroy	William Foran
Peggy Chatfield	Katherine Meskill
Announcer	Randolph Preston
Referee	Arnold Spector
First Man	George Matthews
Second Man	Martin Ritt
Third Man	Norman Budd
Hornblower	Topper Jordan

NEW YORK TIMES
February 14, 1942

THE PLAY IN REVIEW

"They Should Have Stood in Bed"

By BROOKS ATKINSON

AS SUB-TITLE to "They Should Have Stood in Bed," which was acted at the Mansfield last evening, Leo Rifkin, Frank Tarloff and David Shaw are entitled to the use of "Four Men on a Pug." For the three men on the authorship of this harum-scarum comedy are writing a prize-ring rumpus in the breezy style of "Three Men on a Horse" and "Room Service," which are parts of this country's cultural heritage. If it were not for A. J. Liebling's researches into the telephone booth Indians of Jollity House, originally published in The New Yorker, a student of manners might be inclined to classify "They Should Have Stood in Bed" among the improbabilities of farce.

* * *

But now we know that small-time chiselers do live by compounding petty rackets into a way of life—making one nickel do for three telephone calls, stretching blackmail into grandiose schemes of profit and knocking themselves out with smartness. And so comedy is a legitimate description of this yarn about a desk-space promoter, an ambulance chaser, a private detective and a dealer in stolen clothing who rig a fight, bet the purse three times against their contender and keep three jumps ahead of the police and one ahead of the gangsters for three acts of knockabout fooling.

* * *

This tempered appreciation of "They Should Have Stood in Bed" is written by one playgoer who thoroughly enjoyed the knavish atmosphere of the play, roared at many lines and at one situation in particular and yet came away from the Mansfield a little dissatisfied. For the writing and staging of these skylarks in the vernacular of Gotham require a logic of narrative and a clarity of outline that the authors and the directors have just missed. The first act of business hocus-pocus is written and played with a humorous earnestness that is capital. Halfway through the second act there is one scene as hilarious as anything acted this season. The penniless tycoons have just discovered that two of them have individually bet the entire purse against their contender, compounding an underworld felony that means death. Jack Gilford, who played in "Meet the People" last season, and Sanford Meisner translate this scene into a tremendously funny caricature of terror and melancholy.

* * *

Although there is some rowdily comic stuff in the last half of the evening, none of it touches again the uproariousness of this desperate pantomime. The prize-ring scene, in which Tony Canzoneri pushes his dukes at Edwin Philips, is burlesqued out of any semblance to reality, and the confusion of the last scene comes as anti-climax. By this time the three authors of the play seem to be as desperate as the four telephone booth Indians whom they are satirizing, and you begin to suspect that they may have scribbled "They Should Have Stood in Bed" on a sub-lease desk in Jollity House.

If Luther Adler's direction misses the final touch of mastery for this brand of comedy it is by no means without a distinction of its own. Many of the scenes are acted with the eager sobriety of sound extravaganza. As the most inventive of the Broadway charlatans, Grant Richards gives an excellent performance of alertness and worry. Edwin Philips is amusingly naive as he who gets slapped in the face. In his first stage engagement the little Canzoneri, who held a whole flock of ring championships for many years, proves himself to be a better actor than big Jack Dempsey. Florence Sundstrom, Katherine Meskill, John Call, LeRoi Operti, William Foran and George Matthews contribute individual excitement to the evening's insanity and Mr. Meisner does his bit to make despondency funny. As for Mr. Gilford, he adds clowning to his talent for comedy playing.

Let's not forget Samuel Leve's frowning design of a dingy office and its hopeless furniture. Some funny things occur in these poverty-stricken surroundings, although "They Should Have Stood in Bed" does not recapture the spontaneity of "Three Men on a Horse" and "Room Service."

NEW YORK JOURNAL-AMERICAN
February 14, 1942

Canzoneri Starred In Prize Fight Farce

By JOHN ANDERSON

AFTER an insufficient number of postponements, something called "They Should Have Stood in Bed" appeared at the Mansfield Theatre last night. It was written, the playbill freely admits, by Leo Rifkin, Frank Tarloff and David Shaw and produced by Sam H. Grisman in association with Alex H. Cohen. In the absence of any law that forces a man to present a play against his will, I assume that they all knew what they were doing and did it voluntarily. We may even assume that they read the play, though it seems improbable.

Until some days ago the play was known as "They Shoulda Stood in Bed," but the slight grammatical improvement seems hardly worth the trouble. They shoulda stood away.

The Messrs. Authors set out to tell, with a good many frantic details, the story of four young fellows who bamboozle and blackmail a prize fighter into a match with an innocent youth whose highest ambition seems to get a job in Cincinnati. They finally get "One-Round Henry" into a ring with Killer Kane, and since each side has bet on the other, the two boys loaf around, trying not to hurt each other. In some sort of last act skulduggery, the Commissioner has to make the decision and decides in favor of "One-Round Henry" because he finds Killer Kane embracing Mrs. Commissioner.

The situations are foolish, without being funny, and the actors seem to work on the theory that they put humor in the lines by yelling them.

To blame the director would be like blaming the motorman for the erratic behavior of a street car which has no tracks, and the occasion would not be worth mentioning at all, I suppose, except to mark the dramatic debut of Tony Canzoneri, a modest event which the former champion managed with suitable decorum.

"They Should Have Stood in Bed"

NEW YORK DAILY NEWS
February 14, 1942

Foolish Farce Has Tony Canzoneri as A Crooked Fighter

"They Should Have Stood in Bed," comedy by Leo Rifkin, Frank Tarloff and David Shaw. Produced by Sam H. Grisman in association with Alex Cohen at the Mansfield Theatre, New York, Feb. 13, 1942.

★

By BURNS MANTLE

THREE gentlemen named Rifkin, Tarloff and Shaw have taken the pattern that was once used for another farce called "See My Lawyer" and written a new version which they call "They Should Have Stood in Bed."

It was played vigorously at the Mansfield Theatre last night, under the direction of Luther Adler, and caused a mild hysteria with scattered groups in a friendly audience.

The situation is again that of a group of indigent tenants about to be tossed into the alleyway for the non-payment of their rent. In desperation they agree to furnish an opponent for a purse fighter who contracts to lose.

If they can get a client who is an innocent nitwit into the ring with the fighter and fix it so the nitwit can lose first, they will have a chance to win a good deal of money.

One Situation

The one possible comedy situation in this synthetic story is that of the fight, with Tony Canzoneri, an ex-champion of, so far as I know, stainless professional reputation, trying to badger Edwin Philips, a harmless juvenile, into hitting him hard enough to give him an excuse to lie down and be counted out.

For the rest of the evening Mr. Adler has been able to extract laughter only from detached and irrelevant scenes and occasional lines of dialogue inserted with little or no relation to the story in hand.

Actors Handicapped

The actors' work is strenuous and hearty. The players include, in addition to Mr. Canzoneri, who should have stayed away, and Mr. Philips, the Sanford Meisner who had previously contributed creditable characterizations to the theatre; Grant Richards, an ambitious newcomer; Jack Gilford, who had some success in the "Meet the People" revue; LeRoi Operti, William Foran and Florence Sundstrom.

Samuel Leve did the settings. Mr. Adler's direction is peppery but hardly helpful. It is doubtful if anyone could have done much with the material provided, but a drastic pruning might have helped.

NEW YORK HERALD TRIBUNE
February 14, 1942

Skirmish

By RICHARD WATTS, JR.

IN HIS learned column in the sports section Mr. Stanley Woodward, the eminent sage, reports that he left after the first act of "They Should Have Stood in Bed," the new play in which Tony Canzoneri, a great man of the prizering, makes his theatrical debut. Despite my high regard for Mr. Woodward, I fear I must take him to task for not having more confidence than that in the three authors of the work. I, on the other hand, had every faith in them. On the basis of their creative endeavors in the opening episode, I saw every reason to believe that they had just got started and would proceed to get even worse in the succeeding stanzas. As usual, I was correct. Acts Two and Three are distinctly more terrible than Act One, incredible as that may seem.

* * *

The one fascinating thing about the new comedy is a conference of producers and authors that seems to have preceded it. The title, as Mr. Woodward also explains, is based on a celebrated remark attributed to the late Joe Jacobs by Dan Parker. The sponsors of the play were not sure they had it exactly right, though. So they went into deep and studious conclave and finally emerged with stop-press news of great moment to the theater and American culture in general. They had decided to change the title of their wonderwork from "They Shoulda Stood in Bed" to "They Should Have Stood in Bed." Nothing so momentous has happened in the drama since an earlier play this season had its name changed from "Fire Escape" to "The Man With Blonde Hair."

* * *

Unfortunately, nothing else concerned with the saga set down by Leo Rifkin, Frank Tarloff and David Shaw equals that event in magnitude. What the trio has written is a dull, frantic, tasteless and rather offensive farce about the efforts of four singularly disagreeable gentlemen to blackmail their way into some money. There is something about a restaurant and a prizefight, in which both contestants want to lose, and a fatuous boxing commissioner—though some of the boys tell me that phrase is a redundancy—and his amorous wife, and gangsters called Little Louie, Big Louie and Just Louie, and a lot of complicated skulduggery on all sides. I would feel sorry for any one who had to outline the complexities of the plot, but, anyway, most of the comedy is based on the theory that there is nothing so comical as blackmail. It is but fair to add that a lot of the first-nighters seemed to share this belief. A lot of actors, some of them good, darted about manfully.

NEW YORK WORLD-TELEGRAM
February 14, 1942

Shoulda Stood in Bed Wins Some Laughs

By NORTON MOCKRIDGE

REMEMBER those energetic, if indigent, young men of Room Service who had so much difficulty producing a play written by a good-looking but terribly stupid country youngster? And those equally mettlesome young men of Three Men on a Horse, who had such trouble with racing bets, worked out by an inspirational but short-witted greeting card poet?

Of course you do, and so do Leo Rifkin, Frank Tarloff and David Shaw. Apparently fascinated by the antics of the office-in-hat executives, the three authors of They Should Have Stood in Bed, have gone into the whole familiar business again.

Only this time, just for variety, there are some ingenious changes: The vigorous "promoters" pursue different lines of business than did their predecessors, the racket is boxing instead of racing or theatricals, and the moronic, but handsome, young fellow is a combination chef and boxer instead of poet or author. You see the difference?

Last night's audience—or at least a good part of it—appeared to be enjoying itself when the clowning was at its height, and Director Luther Adler made the most of his material, managing to siphon some humor from even the driest and most ancient situations. But we couldn't help recalling we'd seen it all before.

This version deals with four "promoters," who share desk space in an office from which they are about to be evicted. There's Al Hartman, the idea man; Barney Snedeker, a lawyer who never had a case; Sam Simpkins, who sells stolen suits, and George Jensen, a would-be private detective. The main turbulence is launched when, in order to get a champion boxer, Killer Kane, to sponsor the restaurant they hope to open (if they get the money), they scheme a gentle blackmail by photographing Kane in compromising poses with a boxing commissioner's wife. Involved? Just wait.

* * *

The restaurant, they feel, is certain to succeed since the kid they have in tow, Harry Angel, is a wonderful chef. Idiotic though he is, Angel thinks he ought to take a paying job in Cincinnati (and we wish he had), but they talk him out of it. Besides, there's the customary girl he hates to leave.

The kid becomes involved with the boxing commissioner's generously seductive wife and, as is to be expected, in this play, finds himself matched for a bout with Killer Kane, who also "goes for this babe." All of which encourages the promoters, certain that Angel will lose, to bet $30,000 they haven't got on the Killer.

The bets (wouldn't you know it?) are placed with three trigger-fingered gamblers, and when the partners learn that Killer plans to throw the fight, the madness reaches its peak. There's lots more—stuff about a landlord, who periodically threatens to eject the promoters; the boxing commissioner, who's worried about his wife (he should be), and the championship bout in which each fighter strives desperately to stay away from the other. From here on you can fill in any events you like and they'll never be noticed.

The acting, in most cases, is good and the players strive mightily to keep their roles from becoming too stereotyped. Particularly successful in this are Jack Gilford as Snedeker and Sanford Meisner as Sam Simpkins, the two more worried of the promoters.

Grant Richards (who looks and acts a great deal like Sam Levene), puts as much conviction into his portrayal of Al Hartman as can be expected, and John Call is bright and amusing as the wacky private detective. Tony Canzoneri, former champion boxer, making his theatrical debut, manages his few lines with comparative ease and shows some understanding of comedy pantomime in the boxing scene.

George Matthews, Martin Ritt and Norman Budd offer unique characterizations of the three gamblers. Edwin Philips does well as the bewildered kid and LeRoi Operti is amusing as the heckled landlord.

Some of our neighbors laughed heartily now and again, but as for us, well, we shifted uneasily all night. Maybe it was the ghost of Room Service breathing down our neck.

"They Should Have Stood in Bed"

NEW YORK POST
February 14, 1942

"They Should Have Stood in Bed" Exhausting Prize-Fight Farce

By WILELLA WALDORF

TONY CANZONERI, described in the advance publicity as "former lightweight champion of the world," made his stage debut last night at the Mansfield Theatre in an incredibly bad farce entitled "They Should Have Stood in Bed." Mr. Canzoneri was less noisy and more laconic than most of the other actors on the stage and we found his performance on the whole soothing in the midst of bedlam.

In the course of the play he is called upon to take part in a prize-fight for the welterweight championship. This was a trifle perplexing. What, if anything, is the difference between a lightweight and a welterweight? Is it a matter of pounds or is welterweight merely a pet name given by sports writers to lightweight fighters? Nobody in our immediate vicinity was able to shed any light on the question, but it really didn't matter a great deal, since the ringside scene that finally took place in Act 3 was of a distinctly crack-pot variety, with each of the participants doing his best to "throw" the fight. Mr. Canzoneri's opponent, Edwin Philips, managed to collapse first, but the boxing commissioner reversed the decision later because his wife was carrying on with Canzoneri. As a matter of fact she was carrying on with both of them, being the carrying-on kind.

This is only a wee slice of the plot, but even it is confusing. What went before was even more so, and what followed was equally baffling. Incidentally it was all amazingly exhausting. A foursome including Grant Richards, Sanford Meisner, Jack Gilford and John Call adopted young Mr. Philips because he was a wonderful cook and they wanted to start a restaurant. In the innocent pursuit of a blackmail plot, they stumbled into the prize-fighting business instead, with a great deal of complicated betting on the side. It is impossible to be sure, but we feel quite certain that most of the actors had to be rubbed down and slapped in the face with towels between scenes. Several were dangerously limp after a particularly trying bout with the dialogue and stage direction, but all were on their feet at the final curtain. Actors are made of tougher stuff than you might think.

Luther Adler, who directed the piece but did not appear in it—probably he was too weak from his exertions to do anything more strenuous than pant in the wings during the performance—used the rousing technique of lining everybody up every so often with a victim in the middle to shout at. Some of the performers were funny people in themselves, but every time anybody got a laugh, he had apparently been instructed to keep doing the same thing over and over until not another gurgle could be wrung from the audience.

At one point during the fight scene, William Foran, playing Canzoneri's manager, peered over the footlights and remarked conversationally, "I should have stood in bed," thereby reminding us of the title of the play. An expert on strange expressions that go the rounds for a few months and then perish informs us that this one was invented by the late Joe Jacobs while shivering from the cold during a World Series game. It is now in the nature of a Sports World classic, and what Mr. Jacobs meant presumably was that he should never have come. As a title for the farce at the Mansfield it seemed almost painfully apropos.

There is no use endeavoring to explain how things like this come about, but a gentleman seated nearby last night had a try at it during one of the intermissions. "As I see it," he said thoughtfully, "It's a sort of take-off on 'Three Men on a Horse.'"

NEW YORK NEWSPAPER "PM"
February 15, 1942

Go Back to Bed and Stay There

By LOUIS KRONENBERGER

ONLY a guy who worked on space rates would care to linger over this one.

It's a loud-clattering jalopy of a farce which when it first came off the assembly lines was called *Three Men on a Horse*. It now substitutes noise for fun, and pugs for ponies, and tells how some small-time chiselers, by means of a little blackmail, promote a fight between a killer and a kid who has never had gloves on before. The racketeers not only lay dough they haven't got; they lay it three times over, with three different bookies. Comes the fight itself, and both sides try to throw it. Comes the aftermath, and a whole new set of high jinks. There's no letup to the end, and they're still doing something or other as the curtain falls.

There are a few funny moments to the evening, which the rest of the time is absolutely and inexpressibly terrible.

If all this is to be remembered, let it be as the occasion of Tony Canzoneri's stage debut. Mr. Canzoneri, despite what it took to become featherweight, junior lightweight, junior welterweight and lightweight champion of the world, never had to take on any such opponent as *They Should Have Stood In Bed*. He did what he could.

So did Sanford Meisner, Jack Gilford, Grant Richards, Florence Sundstrom, Edwin Philips and a dozen others. Except, of course, that they could have stood in bed.

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